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RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001582

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: FUTURE ENGAGEMENT WITH ABKHAZIA AND UN  
MISSION DISCUSSED

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment. In recent meetings, UN Special Representative Johann Verbeke and other European diplomats have proposed various ideas on the future of the international community's engagement with the breakaway regions, and a possible new role for the UN. Expressing satisfaction that the EUMM has extended its mandate for one year, German Ambassador Flor stated that the EUMM is "only a stabilizer for a status quo that isn't satisfactory," emphasizing the need for action on a renewed UN presence in the breakaway regions. Verbeke reported that broad support exists for the idea of a rotating team of UN international staff based in Geneva. French Charge Baran saw a clear "difference in opportunities" between Abkhazia and South Ossetia, with multiple options for Abkhazia and no options for engagement in South Ossetia. All indications are that the Abkhaz would welcome a UN presence; de facto "foreign minister" Sergei Shamba even omitted the phrase "in light of new realities" when encouraging a new UN human rights presence in Abkhazia. All of these thoughts are useful as we consider how the USG should approach the question of engagement with the separatist regions. End Summary and Comment.

#### GERMAN AMBASSADOR CALLS FOR UNIFIED APPROACH

¶2. (C) In an August 9 meeting with DAS Bryza, German Ambassador Flor strongly supported a unified position for Western allies for future engagement with the breakaway regions. Now could be an opportune time to seek that engagement, according to Flor. A Lutheran church leader who recently visited the small German Lutheran church in Sochi told us that the Abkhaz are becoming more restive and uncomfortable with Russia's approach; although they want security, they do not want it at the price of a loss of all freedom of movement and loss of their identity. As Ambassador Flor pointed out, with a generous estimate of 90,000 Abkhaz living in the breakaway territory, in ten years this could easily shrink to one fifth of the region's population, and they are very conscious of their potential minority status. (Note: Estimates of the size of the ethnic Abkhaz population vary widely, but most observers agree the Abkhaz are already outnumbered by other ethnic groups. End note.) Direct engagement also poses the challenge of knowing who is really pulling the strings on the Abkhaz side, and there was little confidence that it would be the Abkhaz de facto authorities. Practical issues present big challenges, such as the question of whether a university in Tbilisi would recognize a diploma from a university in Abkhazia. Ambassador Flor suggested that if any of the Western Ambassadors travel to Abkhazia, they should go together as a group, and encouraged coordinated positions on engagement with both breakaway regions.

UN SECRETARY GENERAL'S SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE'S VIEW ON THE  
FUTURE FOR THE UN IN ABKHAZIA

13. (C) In a separate August 9 meeting Johann Verbeke, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative, proposed a rotating team of five international staff to replace the former UNOMIG operation. Verbeke reported that he will be in his position until the end of December, based out of Geneva, and will likely be seized with implementing this "light structure" for the UN in Georgia. Verbeke reported that broad support seems to exist for this idea. This structure, which would be based in Geneva, answers the question of where to base the team, and where to accredit them. According to Verbeke the UN would have one person always in Geneva, with the rest of the team in Tbilisi or Abkhazia, for a total of five members. The team would support the Incident Prevention and Response (IPRM) meetings and provide a UN presence on the ground. As Verbeke described it, the team would focus on human rights issues, but would not have it as an official title. The envisioned team could identify gaps in a variety of areas, including poverty and human rights, and then the UN could send in expert groups from Geneva, New York, or possibly the EU as needed. According to Verbeke, the Russians have said they do not want a renewed presence connected to the Geneva talks, and the final home base for the team has not been decided. Once such a team is established, it would be watched carefully and modified as needed.

#### POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD PRESENTED BY FORMER UNOMIG HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER

14. (C) In separate meetings on August 12 and 13 with Poloffs, Ryszard Komenda, former head of UNOMIG human rights office in Abkhazia, described four possible ways to

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re-establish a human rights presence in Abkhazia, or an even broader UN presence. His possible options are outlined below:

A) Establish in the Gali region of Abkhazia one international staff -- a human rights officer reporting to Vladlen Stefanov, (the Human Rights Advisor in the South Caucasus for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ((OHCHR)), and reports to the High Commissioner.) Stefanov did not previously report on Abkhazia because of the existing OHCHR presence (Komenda) as part of UNOMIG. In addition to the one international staff member of OHCHR based in Gali, one or two local staff are envisioned. One would be a professional (lawyer) and one administrative staff member. There would also be perhaps one local national staff in Sokhumi. According to Komenda, the UN did not want the new presence to appear to be a replacement presence for UNOMIG (Comment: the Abkhaz have expressed support for a renewed UN presence in Abkhazia. The Russian attitude is unclear. End comment).

#### OTHER OPTIONS

B) One OHCHR officer linked with the Geneva support team (as described by Verbeke, above). This person would be a combined political/human rights officer and would rotate and administratively function the same as the rest of the team.

C) A new regional office for the South Caucasus and Black Sea region. This could possibly be based in Istanbul to cover the entire South Caucasus and Black Sea region. This would include all "entities" i.e. N-K, Abkhazia, S. Ossetia, plus all states in the region. OHCHR currently has no presence in Kiev or Turkey.

D) More politically difficult, but with the broadest mandate for capacity building, would be a freestanding office, a model of which exists the Palestinian territories. According to Komenda this would be best for projects, but difficult to achieve with opposition expected from both Georgia and Russia.

15. (C) At the same time, UNHCR has approached the USG for funding to support stationing four "UN Protection Officers" in Gali under UNHCR auspices. The goal of this initiative would be to provide continued UN support for Gali residents once the human rights office in Abkhazia, which is connected

to the expired UNOMIG mandate, closes.  
TEFFT